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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 7076  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2665  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8659  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4603  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 3261

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 000251

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PK PREL

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS OBSERVATION UPDATE

Classified By: CDA Peter Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 15, Charge met with NSA Tariz Aziz to urge the GOP to immediately renew visas for International Republican Institute (IRI) Pakistan mission staff. Charge later met with IRI to discuss plans for election monitoring. IRI said that they expected their board to meet in Washington as early as this week to decide on reactivating the observer mission; on the ground, they are proceeding with plans for the mission. IRI local staff said they were still interested in doing exit polling but acknowledged that it was not part of the DRL or USAID contract. They were generally satisfied with security conditions and observer access issues. End summary.

¶2. (C) On January 15, Charge and Polcouns met National Security Advisor Tariq Aziz on several issues, including IRI's pending visa renewal. Charge noted that President Musharraf had welcomed international observers, that IRI had a good five year record in Pakistan working with all parties, and that we hoped the visa issue could be resolved quickly. Aziz took notes and said he would look into the matter at once. Separately, Charge wrote to the Minister of Economic Affairs Division (EAD), which controls memoranda of understanding for NGOs and made the same points. We understand several NGOs currently are having difficulty with MOU approval from EAD.

¶3. (C) Later, Charge and Polcouns met with representatives of the International Republican Institute (IRI) to discuss the latest on IRI's election observation mission. Rob Varsalone and Steve Cima said they were generally satisfied with security conditions and observer access but continued to press the Elections Commission for approval to conduct an exit poll. Charge noted that IRI's contracts with DRL and USAID did not include exit polling; Varsalone agreed and said this activity would be funded by the National Endowment for Democracy. He also explained that IRI's planned exit polling would be limited and was not envisioned to be conducted nationwide. Varsalone said that he hoped that the IRI board in Washington would meet this week to approve reactivating the observer mission that was pulled back after Benazir Bhutto's assassination. IRI Pakistan has continued to organize for the mission and hopes to go forward as soon as possible. Polcouns noted that the MFA is primed and ready to assist with visa issuance for the observers.

¶4. (C) Varsalone also advised Charge that IRI will put another poll in the field next week and expected results by the first week of February. Because results will not be available until weeks before the election, IRI said it probably would not release all results publicly but would share them with the Embassy.

¶5. (C) Comment: While IRI clearly would like to conduct a limited exit poll, Varsalone did not appear optimistic about the likelihood the Election Commission would agree to their proposal. Since it is envisioned as a limited project that could not be used to check nationwide voting, we believe that IRI is pursuing this to keep its foot in the door for future projects in Pakistan. We will continue to push the GOP on the visa issue. Separately, European members of the like-minded elections group indicated that they would very much like IRI to return as they do not want to be the sole international observer team on the ground.

BODDE